

Fellowship Circle Resources - Topics: Violence

Chalice Lighting, Opening Reading

Here comes the helicopter,

Second time today

Everybody scatters

And hopes it goes away

How many kids they've murdered

Only God can say

If I had a rocket launcher

If I had a rocket launcher

If I had a rocket launcher

I'd make somebody pay

I don't believe in guarded borders and I don't believe in hate

I don't believe in generals or their stinking torture states

And when I talk with the survivors of things too sickening to relate

If I had a rocket launcher

If I had a rocket launcher

If I had a rocket launcher

I would retaliate

On the Rio Lacuntun one hundred thousand wait

To fall down from starvation or some less humane fate

Cry for Guatemala with a corpse in every gate

If I had a rocket launcher

If I had a rocket launcher

If I had a rocket launcher

I would not hesitate

I want to raise every voice, at least I've got to try

Every time I think about it water rises to my eyes

Situation desperate echoes of the victim's cry

If I had a rocket launcher

If I had a rocket launcher

If I had a rocket launcher

Some son-of-a-bitch would die

Bruce Cockburn, If I had a Rocket Launcher, from the CDs Stealing Fire and anything anytime anywhere.

Check In

Focus Reading

Over Christmas I watched one of my nephews play his favorite video game. It is what is called a "first person shooter" game, where the player is the shooter and the game gives him the view that a person would be seeing as they stalk through the mazes looking for people to kill. And kill they do, in an extremely graphic and realistic way, victims grabbing the placed they are shot and body parts blown away in a spray of blood.

This isn't far removed from the cartoon violence of the Roadrunner and Wile E. Coyote that I grew up with, except that Wile E. always got back up. But a recent Sport Illustrated article about the people who dress up as mascots at sporting events reported frequent violence against the mascots: people thought they were like cartoon characters, not people.

American culture is schizophrenic about violence. A Hispanic immigrant that works for my brother-in-law noted with surprise that if he hit his wife here, he went to jail. Schools are working now to reduce bullying and threats, a real step up from when I was a kid. But on the other hand, violence is entertainment: football (perhaps having its origins in Celtic festivals where celebrants fought over a severed head), wrestling, movies... If it bleeds, it leads.

Focus Questions

- 1) Can you list the ways that violence is ritualized in American culture? In sports? In traffic? Is the use of leather, chains and corsets in fashion a nod to the ritualized violence of S&M?
- 2) Do you think that violence is glorified in American culture? How is it linked to paranoia, fear or xenophobia?
- 3) Is the urge to violence an inherent human trait or a learned one? What are the things that make you furious, and want to deck somebody?
- 4) Have there been instances where you were able to avert or stop violence? How did you do it? How have you been able to play peacemaker? Where do you most wish you could act as peacemaker now? Who are the peacemakers you most admire?
- 5) A pagan belief is that like attract like; what you send out returns three times. Is violence its own reward, or is it truly random? Is peace contagious?
- 6) What do you think are the real roots of violence? Can these roots be pulled up? Can they be starved by watering the seeds of peace? Is "inherent worth and dignity of the individual" the beginning of peace?

Check On

Closing Reading

The Gates of Paradise

A soldier named Nobushige came to Hakuin, and asked: "Is there really a paradise and a hell?"

"Who are you?" inquired Hakuin.

"I am a samurai," the warrior replied.

"You, a soldier!" exclaimed Hakuin. "What kind of ruler would have you as his guard? Your face looks like that of a beggar."

Nobushige became so angry that he began to draw his sword, but Hakuin continued: "So you have a sword! Your weapon is probably much too dull to cut off my head."

As Nobushige drew his sword Hakuin remarked: "Here open the gates of hell!"

At these words the samurai, perceiving the master's discipline, sheathed his sword and bowed.

"Here open the gates of paradise," said Hakuin.

From Zen Flesh, Zen Bones, Zen stories and koans compiled by Paul Reps and Nyogen Senzaki